

# Ancient Indian Religions: Buddhism

# Siddhartha Gautama-the Buddha

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Gautama, a noble, left his comfortable life for one of self-denial and meditation. After years of searching, he believed he found enlightenment and wisdom. He then set out to teach others. In this role, he became **the Buddha**, the Enlightenment One.

The core of his teaching lies in the Four Noble Truths:

# The Four Noble Truths

1. Everywhere in life is suffering and sorrow.
2. The cause of pain is self-centered cravings and desires.
3. Pain and suffering can be ended by ending our desire for selfish goals and seeing others as extensions of ourselves. (We typically pursue pleasures that cannot last, leading to rebirth and more pain and suffering.)
4. We can overcome our desires and attain enlightenment by the Middle Path or the 8-fold Path.

# The 8-Fold Path as a Staircase

One step at a time:

Right knowledge. - The 4 Noble Truths

Right intentions - decide what we really want

Right speech – speak truth and speak well of others

Right action – (5) Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not be unchaste. Do not take drugs.

Right livelihood – we must do work that uplifts our being

Right effort – steady and forward looking like the ox

Right mindfulness – keep our minds in control of our senses; All we are is the result of all that we have thought.

Right meditation – We must meditate to see the world in a new way.

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In summary, the 8-fold path consists in :

Renouncing material pleasure,

Controlling emotions

Meditating selflessly

Respecting all living creatures

Acquiring knowledge

cultivating goodness

speaking truth

acting charitably; loving kindness to all

\* anyone can attain Nirvana

# Hinduism and Buddhism:

## Similarities

- life of simplicity and self-denial;
- non-violence;
- reincarnation;
- vision of the ultimate reality – Nirvana close to Hindu concept of Brahman; end of self in union with the world soul;

## Differences

- challenged people to be responsible for themselves; Knowledge is attainable; no dependence on Brahmin class and ritual;
- Did not believe in existence of the individual soul;
- Denied ultimate reality of the material world; illusion; pain and sorrow caused by attachment to things of this world;
- 4 Noble Truths and 8-fold Path;
- \*\* Rejected division of human beings into rigidly defined castes based on previous incarnations; all human beings could reach Nirvana as a result of their behavior in this life;
- Rejected Hinduism's multitude of gods; forbade worship of his own image or person;
- Use of everyday language;

# Sources

- The Noble Truth of suffering is this. Birth is suffering; aging is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering...
- The Noble Truth of the origin of suffering is this: It is this thirst which produces re-existence and re-becoming, bound up with passionate greed...
- The Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering is this: It is the complete cessation of that very thirst, giving it up, renouncing it, emancipating oneself from it, detaching oneself from it.
- The Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering is this: It is simply the Noble Eightfold path, namely right view, right thought; right speech; right action; right livelihood; right effort; right mindfulness; right concentration.
  - » The Buddha's First Sermon, 6<sup>th</sup> c. B.C., northern India

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- By birth one is not an outcast,
- By birth one is not a Brahmin;
- By deeds alone one is an outcast,
- By deeds alone one is a Brahmin
- Siddhartha Gautama or the Buddha, ca.350 B.C.
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# Questions:

Was Siddhartha trying to establish a new religion or was he a reformer within the Hindu tradition?

Is Buddhism a religion or a philosophy?

# The Religious Community

- first disciples were the first **monks** admitted to the sangha(Buddhist religious order);
- Buddhist monasteries;
- Took vows to live life of poverty, to be non-violent and not to marry;
- monks as missionaries; spread teachings; live off charity;
- Sangha eventually refers to entire community-monks and laity;



# Buddhism and Society

- Rejection of caste system meant many early followers included laborers and craftspeople;
- Reluctantly admitted women to Buddhist orders(monasteries); a distraction;
- Monasteries dependent of charity;

# Buddhism Spreads

- Missionaries spread faith over large parts of Asia;
  - Missionaries to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia in 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.
  - Traveled along Central Asian trade routes to China; China to Korea, Korea to Japan;
- \*Trade a powerful

- Buddhism competed with Hinduism and the caste system for over 1,000 years. Never gains a serious foothold in India.
- As certain Buddhist principles were absorbed by Hinduism, Buddhism disappeared in India. Buddha identified by Hindus as one of the incarnations of the god Vishnu;
- India remains an important place of pilgrimage for Buddhists;
- Today, Buddhism survives mainly in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Mumbai, China, Japan and southeast Asia.